

Flamsteed Astronomy Society

Minutes from a meeting held at 7.15 p.m. on Monday 24th January 2005 in the Ashburnham Arms

Present: Lin Potter (Chairperson), Nicki Bearcroft, Pat Wainwright, Eddie Yeadon, Mike Dryland, David Waugh and Jane Bendall

Apologies: David Barnewell

Matters arising: Lin signed off the minutes of the previous meeting.

Jane apologised for not arranging the proposed visit to the Orwell Observatory in May and will do so this week.

Constitution:

One point has arisen over the question of Friends' representation. Polly Lerner wishes to have two nominated unelected Friends appointees on the FAS committee. One would be a member of the Friends Council who would be able to provide an over view from the Friends perspective and explain any important long-term moves within the museum. This person would have voting rights in the committee. While accepting this in principle the committee did feel it would be appropriate to have a person who was interested in astronomy and who at least occasionally attended our regular Society meetings.

The second point concerned the position of the non-elected ex-officio secretary currently held by Jane. The committee had assumed that the secretary was also the Friends representative, but Polly felt that this is an entirely separate role and the secretary/organiser is the day to day working link between the museum, Friends and the society. She feels that the person filling the position must be acceptable to the museum as well as the FAS and therefore to elect a secretary within the committee in the normal way was not satisfactory. The position should be by appointment, with input from the museum, Friends and the FAS. Eddie, after consultation with Nicki and David, will revisit these points with Polly and then will redraft this part of the constitution. He will keep the committee informed of developments and table his amendments for consideration in due course.

Wash up of Bookmart

Mike asked for feedback from the committee about this event and wondered if he should plan for an annual bookmart. Everyone agreed that the event was fun, useful (we all found interesting buys) and had created a very pleasant atmosphere. It would be a good idea to continue on a once-a-year basis, providing that Mike was prepared to plan and organise it. He had dedicated a considerable amount of time and effort to the preparations, given that contributions from the other members had been somewhat meagre. Mike agreed to run another bookmart probably next November in the run up to Christmas.

Wash up of Christmas Party

It was a super evening and thanks were given to Lin for providing such excellent seasonal entertainment. Two points arose, it was poorly attended and it was too short. We agreed that organising two major events in one month was probably a mistake. Secondly we agreed to extend the two hours we had planned to three hours to give everyone a chance to mingle and chat. It was suggested that amplification was probably not needed in the Octagon Room which would both speed things up and simplify the choir's preparations. Mike had produced one of his excellent and most enjoyable quizzes for which he was thanked.

Recruitment

Members of the observing group are hoping to find more like-minded members who are enthusiastic and hopefully skilled, observers. Apparently the percentage of members who are active observers is lower than in most typical astronomy societies. Although we are, like Herstmonceux and the Institute of Astronomy in Cambridge, rather different from the norm, in that we offer the facilities of the Royal Observatory and the museum, the back up and support from professional astronomers, not to mention the historic importance of the site, we have agreed a focused recruitment campaign would be useful.

We also decided that we would wait to see the outcome of the recruitment drive at Astrofest before discussing advertising.

Jane will put the FAS on the Federation of Astronomy Societies listings, pointing enquirers to the website and the Friends office.

Mike, with considerable help from Nicki and Chris, has produced an excellent publicity pack for Astrofest containing posters, leaflets and cards.

Mike's efforts to place a small poster in the 28" dome and Weller gallery has so far met with failure as the design does not meet corporate standards. He will pursue determinedly.

Nicki suggested we could ask Telescope House to display a poster.

GCSE classes should be a fertile ground for recruitment. Perhaps one of the committee could visit the adult classes in the spring rather than relying on the tutors concerned to spread the word.

Dark Field Site. Peter Kitcherside has done excellent work by approaching his golf club in Ash near Brands Hatch in Kent to ask if we could use their car park. So far his reception has been good and he is awaiting the return of the manager from sick leave to take the suggestion further. In the meantime Mike and Jane will ask Polly about Friends indemnity and whether we would be covered in case of accidents. We also need to ascertain what conditions the golf club's insurance might impose. When these hurdles have been overcome we suggested that some committee members visit the club's

manager with Peter and discuss details e.g. facilities available, frequency of use (perhaps up to 20 events per year) and notice necessary for gatherings; keeping Polly informed at all times. We would also have to prepare a carefully worded letter of agreement and thanks.

In return we might be able to reciprocate by offering visits to the Royal Observatory, invites to the Star lecture and to our Christmas party etc. There may be considerable scope for cross fertilisation between the golf club and museum as time passes and the observing programme develops.

The date of the next gathering at the Hare and Billet, to be announced by Lin on Monday 7th February, is to be Monday 21st February. If weather is favourable there might be some viewing on the Heath but essentially these meetings are to be regarded as a social get together for all of the society's members.

Coronado

Lesley Bound's report from the recent meeting was tabled. There have been problems with the motor drive and battery pack. The group are to discuss procedures for more impromptu Coronado sessions. The full manual is now on the website. The committee passed a vote of thanks to Lesley for running such a successful project.

Training on 28" telescope

Eddie and Mike will arrange with Robert Massey the necessary procedures and numbers involved for the training of volunteers in the use of the 28" telescope. Eddie stressed the vital importance of following set procedures. Each of the professional astronomers have their own very individual approach to the use of the telescope, but this is unhelpful to the amateur volunteer, who does not get enough opportunity to practice and therefore work out shortcuts. Eddie has prepared an extensive and thorough manual and it is essential that it is followed by the trainer as well as the volunteer trainees. It was suggested that we produce laminated sheets with clearly stated bullet points for use by volunteers.

We will ask for volunteers for training giving priority to Coronado trained members.

Viewing in the Courtyard during Evenings with the Stars events. The Committee agreed that the idea of having telescopes in the courtyard run by the FAS for the public before and after each public session was excellent. Robert has already welcomed the plan, but we are awaiting feedback from Tony and John before we take it forward. There are no ROG telescopes available during refurbishment so FAS members will have to provide their own instruments.

Plans for Flamsteed telescope

In a move to make the telescope more accessible to members, it has been agreed that Mike Dryland will collect the telescope from David Barnwell. David Woodford has volunteered to keep the telescope at his flat and bring it to observing meetings. Mike and David will discuss details and decide the best place to hold the Flamsteed. Lin will announce the new arrangements at the next FAS meeting.

Programmes

We will start planning our next season's programme at the next committee meeting.

Telescope workshop: Francisco has suggested that he runs a second telescope workshop with emphasis on problems, questions and challenges concerning the practical use of telescopes. It was decided that we canvass members as to whether they are interested and asking them for their questions and what points they would like Francisco to cover. Also is Saturday afternoon a convenient time or should we try for an evening or a Sunday afternoon? It is important that we stress that the event has a wide appeal for everyone; it is not just for telescope owners. Given a good response we could list priorities that we would like Francisco to deal with. Venues will be difficult and if there appears to be enough interest, we might consider hiring a local church hall.

Jane mentioned that the lecture on contemporary cosmology is scheduled for Easter Monday. It was decided to open the lecture to visitors as many members might be away during the holiday.

Website status:

Mike has redesigned the home page incorporating helpful suggestions from David Waugh. Events are now grouped by type with the sidebar grouping by date. He has also added a member's classified advertisement section including equipment items.

The "Join Us" and "Contact Us" sections now have both application and enquiry forms with push button submission, which has already been used.

There are new items from Nick Vermeulen and David Woodford, plus a comprehensive section on Public Solar Viewing with the Coronado manual, the current member's rota and links to more reading on the latest solar activity e.g. SOHO.

Any Other Business

- a. Lapel badges. The Friends office have now typed up the badges and we will distribute them at the next FAS meeting

Date of Next Meeting

Tuesday 8th March at 7.15. In the Ashburnham Arms